
A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php

On the Way? Developing Relationships between the Church of England and the German Evangelical Churches

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A Developing Relationship

Since 1945 there has been a steady growth in contact and co-operation between the Church of England and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD).[1] Formed after the collapse of the Nazi regime, the EKD is a federation of Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches in Germany, including since 1991 the Churches of the former Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR (BEK). In its new 1991 constitution the enlarged EKD describes itself as a Communion of Churches[2], all of which are signatories to the Leuenberg Agreement of Reformation Churches in Europe (Leuenberger Koncordie) of 1973, establishing 'altar and pulpit' fellowship between them.

The EKD is the largest non-Catholic church grouping in the European Community. It is Evangelical in the sense of the German word *evangelisch*, i.e. 'protestant', rather than *evangelikal* or 'evangelical' in the usual English sense of the term.[3] It encompasses as wide a range of theological self-understanding and ecclesiastical practice as the Church of England. This even includes some features and groups which Anglicans would see as 'high church',[4] although the strongly felt division between *evangelisch* and *katholisch* limits any self-conscious Catholicism.

The EKD has 24 member Churches — eleven Lutheran, two Reformed, and the remainder United (with a predominantly Lutheran tradition). Their boundaries and natures still reflect the establishment of *Landeskirchen* or territorial Protestant Churches in the Reformation era, under the principle

1 For a fuller introduction to the Protestant Church in Germany than I am able to provide here, see Colin Podmore, *The German Evangelical Churches: An Introduction, Following the Meissen Agreement*, Council for Christian Unity of the General Synod of the Church of England, Occasional Paper No. 1, London 1992.

2 It is interesting to find the EKD and also the Lutheran World Federation moving towards a self-understanding as a *Communion* just as the Anglican Communion is having to draw back from some of the implications of that concept.

3 The equivalences here are not exact and should be used with caution. *Evangelikal*, for instance, is not as widely used as our 'evangelical', and carries some implication of extremism. The boundary between 'denominations' and 'sects' as we would call them is in general drawn more conservatively in Germany.

4 For instance, in Thuringia the use of albs and the Peace (in the Roman position) are not uncommon, following the influence of the Principal of the local Predigerseminar in Eisenach. Such regional variation is more marked in Germany than in England.

of *cuius regio, eius religio,* although church and state have been formally separated since 1918, and 'Free' Protestant Churches are now found in formerly uniform Catholic areas. Despite the separation, the state still collects a compulsory church tax (a 10% supplement to income tax) on behalf of the Churches from their registered members[5], and in many parts of former West Germany the tradition of being a *Volkskirche* remains strong. The income from church tax has also allowed the Churches to maintain very substantial social and medical services as part of the welfare system (co-ordinated on behalf of both the EKD and the Protestant Free Churches by a single agency called *Diakonisches Werk*). All these features give at least the large *Landeskirchen* more of a feel of 'establishment' than the legally established Church of England, and (especially following the re-unification) issues of relationship with the state, wealth and national identity are likely to remain both complex and hotly debated.[6]

The Post-War Process

Relationships between Anglican and German Protestants before 1914 reflected the close links between the two nations. These were obviously broken during the war years, but refugees, occupation and the desire for reconciliation combined to generate a new wave of contact and co-operation in the post-war period in both civic and church life, of which the Coventry-Dresden link is only the best known. From 1964 onwards theological conferences were held regularly.[7] Between 1970 and 1972 the first Anglican-Lutheran International Conversations were held[8], and in the ten years that followed, the Lutheran and Episcopal Churches in the United States of America moved steadily towards the establishment in 1982 of 'interim eucharistic sharing' with the hope of full communion to follow.[9]

In that same year the World Council of Churches report on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry[10] and the ARCIC Final Report[11] were also published. With such ecumenical endeavour in the air, it is not surprising that the

5 To avoid the tax, a church member has to formally 'leave the church', and register with the state to that effect. This also removes the former member's entitlement to the services of the church, for weddings and funerals for instance, although this is not always strictly enforced, and there is some tendency for a family's bread-winner to leave the church (and avoid the tax) but the other members to remain (and retain the entitlements).

6 The re-introduction of the collection of church-tax by the state in the former DDR, for instance, occasioned such debate.

7 K. Kremkau, *Die wachsende Gemeinschaft zwischen der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland bzw. ihren Gliedkirchen und der Kirche von England* (2. Auflage), EKD, Frankfurt/M. 1986

8 *The Pullach Report: Anglican-Lutheran International Conversations 1970-1972,* SPCK, London 1973.

9 *The Emmaus Report: A Report of the Anglican Ecumenical Consultation1987,* Church House Publishing for the Anglican Consultative Council, London 1987, pp 79f. The text of the Agreement adopted by the American Churches is printed in *The Cold Ash Report* (see below) pp 20f.

10 *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,* Faith and Order Paper no 111, WCC, Geneva 1982.

11 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report,* SPCK/CTS, London 1982.

Helsinki Report of the Anglican-Lutheran European Commission (1980-82) leapfrogged the US position to recommend full communion, while appreciating that such a move would take time to be 'received' and that the issue of the episcopate in particular was not yet resolved.[12] The Anglican-Lutheran Joint Working Group which met in 1983 echoed this position, recording that its meeting 'was marked by a spirit of joy and gratitude for a new era in Anglican-Lutheran relations', acknowledging that 'in spite of convergence rather than consensus' on the sensitive issue of the episcopate, 'our mutual recognition of Christ prompts us to move with urgency towards the fullest possible ecclesial recognition and the goal of full communion', but recommending in practice the less ambitious steps along the way of mutual eucharistic hospitality and interim eucharistic sharing.[13] This idea of a process, of 'unity by stages', is as the Cold Ash Report puts it, 'a concept that is gaining wide recognition, though not great clarity of definition'[14], and I shall return to consider later the advantages and disadvantages of such a piecemeal approach to communion, while noting that the idea of a process is fundamental to the Meissen agreements.

Encouraged by these developments, Robert Runcie, then Archbishop of Canterbury, took the opportunity of the 500th anniversary celebrations of Luther's birth to propose in 1983 the formal establishment of closer relations between the Church of England and the German Evangelical Churches. The proposal was warmly received in both Germanies, and official delegates met from 1985 onwards to work out a suitable framework of agreement. The Meissen Common Statement of 1988, 'On the Way to Visible Unity', was the fruit of their work.[15] The Declaration contained in para. 17 of the Statement was adopted unanimously as an Act of Synod by the General Synod of the Church of England on 29th January 1991[16], and signed at Westminster Abbey the same day. Further bilateral agreements between the Church of England and the BEK and EKD committing the Churches to specific areas of partnership and exchange were signed in a similar ceremony four days later in Berlin. On both occasions a eucharist was celebrated by the host Church, with representatives from the other churches standing at the altar alongside the President.

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12 *The Helsinki Report: Anglican-Lutheran Dialogue: The Report of the Anglican-Lutheran European Regional Commission. 1982*, SPCK, London 1983.

13 *The Cold Ash Report: Anglican-Lutheran Relations: report of the Anglican-Lutheran Joint Working Group 1983*, ACC/LWF, London and Geneva 1983, pp 5, 16.

14 Ibid., p 14.

15 The English text of the statement is printed in *On the Way to Visible Unity: Meissen, 1988*, GS 843, November 1988. A bilingual text of the Declaration only (= para. 17 of the Statement) is to be found in *The Meissen Common Statement: On the Way to Visible Unity: A Report by the House of Bishops*, GS 931, July 1990. *The Meissen Declaration*, GS 951, January 1991 also gives a bilingual text of the Declaration only. The German edition of the Agreements, *Auf dem Weg zu sichtbarer Einheit*, BEK/EKD, Berlin and Hannover 1988 conveniently gives both English and German texts of the whole Statement, together with a commentary in German only.

16 The General Synod debates and resolutions at the various stages in the process of adoption can be found in the *General Synod Report of Proceedings* vol xix, no 3 (November 1988); vol xxi, no 2 (July 1990) and vol xxii, no 1 (January 1991).

A Personal Involvement

The process thus far recorded can seem one of committees and councils, making national and international agreements far removed from the everyday life of the church. To talk to those involved in the process is, however, to form a different picture. Klaus Kremkau, secretary to the Meissen delegates, has for instance written as follows:

> One would not do justice to the Meissen Declaration if one looked at it only as a consensus document worked out by theologians. In essence it is far more about this: that the Meissen Declaration has arisen out of a common inheritance, a common history and especially since the second world war a continually widening yet also deepening fellowship (*Gemeinschaft*) at many levels of church life. At the same time the increasing partnership connections between congregations and youth groups, church choirs, church places of training and so on have been of particular significance for — and also had their effect on — the process of negotiation between the church leaders. It really was the case that the fellowship between the churches concerned had reached such a level that it could be said that the Meissen Declaration was 'necessary'.[17]

In assessing the significance of the Meissen agreements here, I will be drawing consciously on one such stream of local contact. Pastorin Corinna Diestelkamp (then Siegfried) of the Ev.-lutherische Kirche Hannovers anticipated the Meissen recommendations by over a decade in spending a year of her theological studies at Westcott House in Cambridge in 1978-79, when I myself was a student there. Later in 1989-90 she and I again anticipated Meissen, but this time formally with the support of our respective church authorities, by conducting a full-dress sharing of ministries as if the Declaration were in place, each spending five weeks assisting in the other's parish. Although the final views expressed in this article remain my own, Corinna and her husband Jochen, both now in parish ministry near Lüneburg, have contributed extensively to its preparation, and I am most grateful to them for their insights and hospitality.

The Meissen Agreement

Before moving on to consider some of the issues raised by the Meissen agreements, it will be helpful to summarise the documents concerned. A Chairmen's Forward introduces the Common Statement, chronicling the process which led from Runcie's proposal to the publication of the report. It draws attention to the structure of the Statement, pointing out its dependence on previous ecumenical dialogue and the relatedness of the Declaration to the rest of the Statement preceding it. It envisages that the acceptance of the Declaration would be followed by bi-lateral agreements, a framework of continuing co-operation, and practical suggestions from the ecumenical

17 K. Kremkau, 'Ökumenische Aspekte der Meißener Erklärung', *Una Sancta*, vol 4 (1990), p 298.

officers. The Statement is then divided into sections as follows.

I *The Church as sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom of God.*

The basis for the whole ecumenical venture is laid out clearly by the first sentence of this first section: 'God's plan as declared in the Holy Scriptures is to reconcile all things in Christ in, through and for whom they were made'. Salvation history is seen as the working out of this plan, and the teaching of the letter to the Ephesians on the role of the Church as both sign and agent in accomplishing this is given a prominent place.[18]

II *The Church as koinonia*

A communal character, communion and community (both *Gemeinschaft* in the German) are seen to underly New Testament images of the Church, and this is conceived to be a sharing with our fellow-members of the Church in the life of the Holy Trinity. A baptism inseparable from faith and conversion establishes the community's membership, who then form a corporate priesthood engaged in praise, evangelism and service to humankind, participating in the cross of Christ as it participates also in his work of reconciliation.

III *Growth towards full, visible unity*

Unity is seen as a precondition to successful mission, and the missionary imperative as an urgent call to unity. It is envisaged as reconciled diversity rather than uniformity and also as a provisional process this side of the final coming of the Kingdom. Unity in faith, the sacraments, ministry, and bonds of communion at every level are seen as essential elements of full, visible unity.

IV *Communion already shared*

'As God makes this unity more visible we recognise that we already share a real communion'. The Scriptures as both authentic record and the norm of faith, the Creeds, and church tradition from the Ecumenical Councils through to Reformation inheritance and styles of worship are given as evidences of this. It is noted that although Anglicans and Lutherans have become estranged, they have never condemned each other as Churches, and the post-war official and unofficial development of relationships is acknowledged, as is the wider ecumenical movement.

V *Agreement in faith*

The various reports cited above are given as grounding for the recommended Declaration. It is noted that they are still in the process of adoption and reception, but that they display 'a remarkable theological consistency which already indicates a substantial convergence between the Churches'. Ten specific areas of agreement between the Church of England and the German Evangelical Churches arising from the reports are listed:

(i) The authority of Scripture and its liturgical reading.

(ii) The acceptance of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan and Apostles' Creeds and their trinitarian and christological dogmas.

(iii) The use of a common tradition of liturgical worship.

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18 Eph. 1:3,9,10; 4:7,11-13.

(iv) Belief in water baptism as uniting the believer with Christ, initiating into the church and conferring new life in the Spirit.

(v) Belief in the eucharist as the feast of the new covenant 'in which the risen Christ gives his body and blood under the visible signs of bread and wine to the community. "In the action of the eucharist Christ is truly present to share his risen life with us and to unite us with himself in his self-offering to the Father, the one full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice which he alone can offer and has offered once for all"'.[19]

(vi) Belief in justification 'only by grace through faith', which then leads to good works.

(vii) Belief that the Church is the creation of God not man, though always in the need of reform.

(viii) Belief that all members of the Church share in its mission and are given ministries by the Spirit. The ordained ministry is of divine institution and exists to serve the ministry of the whole people of God.

(ix) Belief that 'a ministry of pastoral oversight (episkope), exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways' is necessary to safeguard the unity and apostolicity of the Church.

(x) Hope in the final consummation of the Kingdom of God, and the imperative now to promote justice and peace and let the obligations of the Kingdom govern our church life and our concern for the world.

It is acknowledged that the German Evangelical Churches do not hold that apostolic episcopal succession should be a necessary condition for full visible unity, 'though being increasingly prepared to appreciate episcopal succession "as a sign of the apostolicity of the life of the whole Church"'. The Anglican understanding of such unity is recorded, however, as continuing to include the historic episcopate and full ministerial interchangeability. 'Because of this remaining difference,' says the Common Statement, 'our mutual recognition of one another's ministries does not yet result in the full interchangeability of ministers.' It does, however, go on to quote from the Helsinki Report that, 'even this remaining difference, when seen in the light of our agreements and convergences, cannot be regarded as a hindrance to closer fellowship between our Churches'.[20]

VI *Mutual acknowledgement and next steps (The Declaration)*

The sixth section of the Statement is a recommendation that the Churches concerned jointly make a Declaration that they commit themselves to strive together for full, visible unity; acknowledge that both Churches

(i) belong to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and participate in its mission;

(ii) have in them authentic preaching of the word and due administration of the sacraments;

(iii) have ordained ministries given by God (and look forward to the full

19 The quoted words are from *God's Reign and Our Unity: the Report of the Anglican-Reformed International Commission 1981-1984*, SPCK, London/The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh 1984.

20 Op. cit., para. 43.

interchangeability of ministers).

(iv) have embodied in them episkope as a visible sign of the Church's unity and continuity in apostolic life, mission and ministry.

and commit themselves to share a common life and mission, taking all possible steps to closer fellowship (*Gemeinschaft*) in as many areas of Christian life and witness as possible. The next steps are then stated to be

(i) to continue official theological conversations and encourage the reception of the emerging consensus from them;

(ii) to establish forms of joint oversight and consultation;

(iii) to participate in one another's worship;

(iv) that authorised ministers may 'subject to the regulations of the churches and within the limits of their competence, carry out the tasks of their own office in congregations of the other churches when requested';

(v) that the Churches establish and encourage mutual eucharistic hospitality;

(vi) that in eucharistic worship presided over by a minister of one of the Churches, ministers of the other Churches, 'in accordance with their rules, may share in the celebration of the eucharist in a way which advances beyond mutual eucharistic hospitality but which falls short of the full interchangeability of ministers'; (concelebration is expressly excluded as an interpretation of this position);

(vii) ministerial participation in ordinations of another Church is explicitly stated not to imply that a reconciled, common ministry has yet been achieved.

The Bilateral Agreements

When the Meissen process began, Germany was still divided. The publication of the Common Statement preceded the collapse of the East German regime, so that although the churches of East and West were able to share in the broad sweep of Statement and Declaration, their institutional and social dividedness meant that separate bilateral agreements between the Church of England and the EKD and BEK were envisaged to cover the detailed practical steps that would follow. By the time the Declaration was signed, Germany was once more a single nation, but the re-uniting of the Churches of the EKD and BEK came a little later. Bilateral agreements were therefore drawn up, but have been somewhat overtaken by history. The agreement with the EKD commits the Churches to encourage partnerships and exchanges at all levels including theological colleges and agencies, and makes the practical arrangements for official theological conversations and joint oversight. Finally a Sponsoring Body, the Meissen Commission, is established to oversee and review the implementation of the Declaration.

On the Way: Issues still to be faced

The Meissen Common Statement ends by noting that the implementation of the proposals in its Declaration will mark an important stage in the growth towards the full, visible unity of the Church, but also that, 'We know that

beyond this commitment lies a move from recognition to the reconciliation of churches and ministries within the wider fellowship of the universal Church'. Likewise, without taking anything away from what has already been achieved, it is important to begin any reflections on what lies in the future with a recognition of the scandal that still persists in the relationships between our Churches. For instance, the small phrase 'subject to the regulations of the churches' in the agreement that ministers may be invited to perform the tasks of their office in congregations of the other Church seems at first sight administrative. In fact it means that I as a priest in the Church of England can invite a Lutheran pastor to do no more in my church than can already be done by a lay member of my congregation, unless the specialised arrangements of a Local Ecumenical Project (and therefore Canon B44 rather than B43) apply. In the personal context of our exchange of ministries, this meant not being able to invite one another to perform the most distinctive functions of our ministry in the way we would naturally do with colleagues from our own Church, even those with whom we feel less 'communion' than with our ecumenical partners. At the institutional level, questions must be asked about the meaning of a declaration that the ministries of a Church are authentic when they may not be exercised. One important immediate task for the Church of England is to revise Canons B43 and B44 to allow ecumenical developments of the kind envisaged by Meissen to take place.[21]

The Nature of the Church

Practical experiences such as these raise the question of the nature of the Church in a sharp way. Central to this question is the nature of the relationship between the local and the wider Church. The Report on Unity and Ecumenical Affairs presented to the Anglican Consultative Council in 1973 captured something of the vision and the tension in that relationship when it declared that, 'the co-operation of Christians is now in a phase which cries out for intercommunion; but local intercommunion may lead to confusion and even sectarianism unless there are more than local approaches to the unifying of ministries and Churches. There must be no shrinking from the conviction that, to use the New Delhi phrase[22], 'all in each place' should be one in ordered fellowship as well as in faith and sacrament'.[23] I would accept this 'New Delhi principle' as determinative for the church at each level of locality. In Banbury, for instance, I find a greater authenticity in the fellowship between churches of all traditions in the town than in the fellowship of Anglican churches of the rather wider deanery. I would suggest that we need to think seriously about whether such ecumenical structures at local, regional, national and international level should not have priority before denominational groupings, however important those are to us. Any boundary other than that of those gathered in Jesus' name cannot avoid scandal, and no other scandal than that occasioned by Christ himself is to be tolerated.

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21 Cf. K. Kremkau, 'Auf dem Weg zu sichtbarer Einheit', *Ökumenische Rundschau*, vol 3 (1989), pp 331f.

22 The reference is to the statement on the nature of the unity we seek made by the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches which met at New Delhi in 1961.

23 *Partners in Mission, ACC Dublin 1973*, SPCK, London 1973, p 2.

Such a model of the Church fits well with the theology articulated in section I of the Common Statement.[24] Belief in the God-given universality of the Church and its faith is combined with the necessity of discovering and incarnating Church and faith locally, inductively rather than deductively. Adrian Hastings has spoken and written movingly from a Catholic perspective about not just the *desirability* but the *necessity* of the local church discovering dogma in this way.[25] He suggests that the dogma and law of the wider Church is always a codification of the understandings which have been won locally, and that the local church must therefore always be crossing the boundaries of established agreements because only in this way can the wider Church gain the experience it needs to reform itself. This concept, which I shall refer to as the Hastings Principle, is in my view both implicit in and necessary to the Meissen process. A practical consequence is that I would want strongly to recommend that the Meissen Commission and other church institutions do not, in this period of new Ecumenical Canons and Agreements, abandon the encouragement of ecumenical experiment. It would, despite the title of the Meissen Statement, be all too easy to feel we had arrived or opt for the comfort of an indefinitely prolonged period of safe reception.

Other issues cluster around this basic question about the nature of the Church. A particular cause for concern is that the Meissen process too easily accepts the status quo of national churches and a common cultural inheritance, even at times seeming to celebrate it.[26] But these ideas are as problematic as they are helpful, and current political change in Europe, with its contradictory drives towards regional sovereignty and federal structures, represents a deep questioning of the post-war settlement which is only now emerging with the collapse of the Communist regimes. In terms of the relationships we are considering here, a key question is where on the agenda the insights of and developments within the former BEK will now come. Or is that part of our common cultural inheritance to be ignored? The next decade could also well see the marginalization of the historic established Protestant Churches begin to have structural consequences in, for example, disestablishment, and the beginning of a new period of both pain and liberation as fossilised patterns of church life break open.[27] It would be good to be working this out together.

The issue of the ordination of women is similarly hidden in the Meissen process[28], and is only one instance of the potential difficulty of what we may call Anglo-Catholic concerns for the future of the relationships between the

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24 The New Delhi principle is quoted in section III para. 8 of the Statement.

25 Adrian Hastings, 'The Authority of the Church, Universal and Local', in R.M.C. Jeffery, ed., *By What Authority?*, Mowbray, London and Oxford 1987, pp51-64. An important discussion of the relationship between Christian dogma and the Christian community, which compares the Anglican and German Protestant situations is to be found in Alister E. McGrath, 'Dogma und Gemeinde: zur sozialen Funktion des christlichen Dogmas', *Kerygma und Dogma*, vol. 37 (1991), pp 24-43.

26 Common Statement, IV.9; but cf. *Auf dem Weg*, p 38 for a recognition that European political issues do demand serious reflection.

27 Cf. Podmore, pp 8f and McGrath, pp 41-43.

28 See below in 'The Nature of Ministry'.

Church of England and the German Protestant Churches. The specific problem of episcopacy will be discussed below, but although in general the Church of England is dressed in its best Protestant clothes in this process, our German partners — while obviously welcoming what they see, for instance, as agreement that the Church is grounded in its listening to Scripture rather than a systematic theology[29] — are well aware that they should not too easily ignore the equally important 'catholic' self-understanding of our Church.[30] There is a question here as to how possible it will be to retain the traditional inclusiveness of the Church of England in such ecumenical reconciliation. Neither charismatic nor Catholic positions will be easy to include, and once again the self-definition of the Church as it emerges or breaks through into new shapes is likely to be a more challenging exercise than the stitching together of previously existing positions. The composition and agenda of the new round of theological conversations need to reflect this.

Behind these unresolved issues about the nature of the Church lies an equally unresolved and significant problem of terminology. The problem centres on the fact that the English terms for fellowship, communion, and community are all likely to be represented in German as *Gemeinschaft*. This means that what might seem to be nuanced distinctions in the English text between the terms mentioned are not heard as such by our German partners, and could indeed seem over-complicated or even irrelevant to them when compared with say the simple commitment of the Leuenberg Agreement to 'pulpit and altar fellowship'. Some attempt is made to regain the nuances with the introduction of further terms such as 'intercommunion', 'eucharistic hospitality' and 'interim eucharistic fellowship'[31], but these do not easily translate either.[32] There is a tension here between the formal aspect of 'unity by stages', with its need to define and characterise the stages, and the desire to by-pass the word-puzzles and establish fellowship on the basis of a shared confession of Christ even where structural unity cannot be attained. This echoes the tension between the local and wider expressions of the Church already discussed, and the same Hastings Principle should be brought into play. It may be that it is only in local experiment that the authentic steps towards full, visible unity can be discerned, and if this is the case it will also be important for the fruits of the various exchanges established under the bilateral agreements to be carefully fed back into the official theological conversations on a continuing basis, and for the fruits of the conversations similarly to be made widely available to every level of the church. The encouragement and oversight of this dialogue between theology and practice is an important task for the Meissen Commission.

Initiation

A second and parallel area where the texts of the Statement seem to be skating on thin ice is that of initiation. In para. V.15 (iv) we read that, 'We

29 *Auf dem Weg*, p 35.
30 Ibid., p 36.
31 *Common Statement*, IV.13.
32 *Auf dem Weg*, p 38.

believe that baptism with water in the name of the Triune God unites the one baptised with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, initiates into the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and confers (*vermittelt*) the gracious gift of new life in the Spirit'. This statement does not appear to have been controversial in any way within the Meissen process. It is hard, however, to imagine a theological position which would not wish to question it in some way. Why, after the challenge to paedo-baptist Churches in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* is the issue of infant baptism left unaddressed?[33] What is the place of confirmation?[34] What theology of regeneration by and baptism in the Spirit is implied by the bland statement of the text? These are important issues in today's Church, and it is sad to see what feels like collusion to avoid them in the interests of convergence and the status quo. At the least two traditions which are seriously compromised in this area could collaborate in seeking possible and creative ways forward.

The Nature of Ministry

The most serious official obstacle to full, visible unity is, however, the difference of understanding between the Churches of the place of the episcopate and manners of *episkope*. That this is so has become something of a *topos* in the process of convergence, and the *Niagara Report* of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcope 1987 was devoted to this issue.[35] Not all Lutheran Churches have re-introduced the office or title of Bishop. Those that have understand the office as one of pastoral leadership and spiritual supervision[36], and would not see it as an order of ministry separate from the presbyterate conferring a distinctive lifelong character.[37] The substantially different understanding of the role of bishops in the two traditions was, for instance, apparent in our own exchange of ministries when for the sake of parity Corinna Diestelkamp approached her bishop to authorise my ministry in Germany as I had approached mine to authorise her ministry in England (under Canon B43). I received a charming letter of welcome, but *authorisation* of this sort was clearly both otiose (in the sense that the ultimate right to share altar and chancel ministry in a parish rests with the local minister to whom it has been entrusted) and puzzling (in the sense that the discernment of calling and authenticity by that minister and parish would

33 *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, pp 6f.

34 It is worth noting that in former West Germany at least confirmation is still very much a folk religion rite of passage and raises many of the same questions which the Church of England faces in the context of an open policy towards infant baptism. It would be hard, for instance, to refuse confirmation to a teenager who publicly denied any faith if the family concerned wanted the ceremony to go ahead.

35 *The Niagara Report: Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcope Niagara Falls, September 1987* by the Anglican-Lutheran International Continuation Committee, Church House Publishing for the ACC/LWF, London 1988.

36 Ibid., pp 41f.

37 In order to ordain ministers at the time of the Reformation, recourse was had to the episcopal nature of presbyteral ministry, and existing presbyters therefore ordained the new ones. It is still legal, if not normal, for ordinations in Lutheran churches to be presided over by a presbyter (ibid., pp 32f, 43).

38 Official commentary from the EKD on this issue of the episcopate can be found in *Auf dem Weg*, pp 39f. It is typical that the problem is partly described there in terms of the

seem more important than authorisation by the hierarchy).[38]

The sticking point for Anglicans here is the place which the Lambeth Quadrilateral has come to have in the Anglican Communion as a definition of the conditions for 'full communion'. The Quadrilateral goes back to the 1886 Chicago General Convention of the American Episcopal Church. It was adopted by the 1888 Lambeth Conference, as 'a basis on which approach may be by God's blessing made towards Home Reunion'.[39] It has come to bear a weight far greater than that for which it was intended. Its fourth article states that the presence of the historic episcopate is necessary for the unity of the Church, but does allow that it will vary in form according to the changing needs of national context.

That the extreme unlikelihood of the German Evangelical Churches accepting the re-ordination of their ministers at the hands of bishops in the apostolic succession has not prevented a lively hope of agreement is largely due to the concentration of recent dialogue on oversight or *episkope* itself rather than the office of bishop. The Niagara Report goes so far as to assert that 'neither of our Churches is able to claim such a degree of faithfulness, that is, a continuity in either doctrine or order, as would enable it to sit in judgement on the other'[40], and urges an immediate movement towards full communion with Anglican recognition of the full authenticity of Lutheran ministries. 'We believe that the basis for such action lies in the recognition that "the apostolic succession in the episcopal office does not consist primarily in an unbroken chain of those ordaining to those ordained, but in a succession in the presiding ministry of a church, which stands in the continuity of apostolic faith"'.[41]

It is most encouraging to see that the ecumenical working groups of the Churches are so confident that this shift of focus will enable this serious obstacle to be overcome. The development of new insight into the leadership of the Church and its maintenance in the apostolic faith and mission is also of enormous value in its own right as new contexts and patterns of ministry emerge. It is still hard to see, however, how the narrow issue of the maintenance of apostolic succession (despite the semi-official recognition in the Niagara Report that this is also not secure for the Anglican Communion)[42] is to be resolved. It is unlikely that the Anglo-Catholics within the Church of England would not propose its necessity before full communion was achieved,[43] and it is doubtful that there would be the same will in the Church as a whole, as for instance seen in the movement towards the ordination of women, to press for a divisive vote.[44]

Church of England having a Protestant view of the nature of the Church, but a Catholic view of the nature of episcopal succession.

39 *Emmaus Report*, p 16.

40 Ibid., p 40.

41 Ibid., pp 43-44, quoting the Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission, *The Ministry in the Church*, LWF, Geneva 1982, p 62.

42 *Niagara Report*, pp 31f.

43 The existence of this 'anglo-katholische Richtung' is recognised in *Auf dem Weg*, p 40.

44 K. Kremkau is of the opinion that this issue of the apostolic succession cannot be resolved at this level of national church agreements. *Auf dem Weg*, p 331.

The question is then what the commitment to strive for unity in the Meissen Declaration really represents in terms of the resolution of this problem. Is the Church of England prepared to see the question of the apostolic succession resolved in some such way as that proposed in the *Niagara Report*? Are the German Churches, who profess their readiness to move towards the full interchangeability of ministers on the basis of the Meissen Declaration alone[45], prepared to accept changes to their episcopal structures not perhaps involving re-ordinations, but certainly what could be seen by them as restrictions or imposed reforms?

As with the nature of the Church, so with the nature of ministry, there are also issues revealed by the difficulties of translation which will need further attention. Behind differences of tradition in *episkope* lie fundamental differences in approach to the whole question of ministry itself. In paragraph V.15 (viii) of the Common Statement we read:

> We believe that all members of the Church are called to participate in its apostolic mission. They are therefore given various ministries by the Holy Spirit. Within the community of the Church the ordained ministry exists to serve the ministry of the whole people of God. We hold the ordained ministry of word and sacrament to be a gift of God to his Church and therefore an office of divine institution.

The text makes a distinction between ministries given by the Spirit on the one hand and the ordained ministry given and instituted by God on the other. This is problematic in three ways. First, it is inadequate as an exposition of the various New Testament passages which speak of gifts, ministries and offices. These are both complex to analyse and also of extreme importance in the current life of the church, marked as it is by an explosive growth of lay and charismatic ministry. Secondly, in speaking of 'the ordained ministry' in the singular it too easily avoids the need to re-examine the traditional pattern of three-fold ordained ministry in the light of new patterns of the diaconate, eldership and team ministry in the church. It also sidesteps the issues of whether bishop and presbyter are to be seen as two offices or one and of whether those ordained to the offices are taking up a function or receiving a character, issues which we have seen are as yet unresolved in the Meissen process. Thirdly, it fails to address the fact that an English reader of the above would not realise that in the German text the words 'ministry' and 'office' are both represented by *Amt*. This materially changes the approach to both these subjects of the the nature of ordained ministries and their status amongst ministries in general by not distinguishing them linguistically. It is very much to be hoped that in future theological conversations issues as important as these will be discussed, and the fruit of the discussions made widely available.

Finally, on the subject of the nature of ministry, it must be seen as remarkable that the question of the ordination of women has no visible impact on the Common Statement. The EKD Commentary in fact notes that in the discussions on ministry this question played no part.[46] Is it really the case that the result of the General Synod vote in November 1992 will have

45 *Auf dem Weg*, p 40.
46 Ibid., p 41.

no consequences for the future relationships discussed here, or is it just that the issue is too delicate to be openly discussed? In our own personal experience the different treatment of women's calls to ministry in our Churches was and will remain a question and a scandal of the greatest importance, and it must be faced.

Protocol or Process?

In reviewing what the Meissen process has achieved and what still lies ahead, we have noted considerable areas of theology and practice which still need to be addressed. Christian initiation and ministry stand out. Significantly both raise questions about the relationship between the work of the Spirit and Church order. The Meissen process can be seen as part of the renewing work of God in his Church today, and it inevitably brings with it a call to reform and renewal of the previously prevailing structures.

The deeper challenge posed by the Meissen Declaration, then, is not about issues but about the very ability of the institutional Churches as we have inherited them to engage in this sort of renewal or reformation from within. Can sufficient local experiment be maintained? Can Church law be revised sufficiently quickly to keep pace with it? Is there a willingness to see previously significant boundaries replaced? And is there in fact a real grasp that, because the Church never perceives perfectly the things of God but is always being led deeper by him into his truth, such a continual renewal is not only a Latin tag (*semper reformanda*) but a condition of faithfulness, and as such a necessary part of our vision?

'Unity by stages', with all its loose-endedness and imprecision, is an attempt to embody that vision. It stands opposed to a position which would require all outstanding issues to be resolved before 'living in unity' was allowed. It leads us first to recognise our existing communion in our Lord, and then to live it out as fully as we can under his lordship, in the belief that *this* is what will resolve the issues which will otherwise always divide us.[47] Such a principle could transform our Churches at every level, not just in our unity but in our whole lives, and could be fairly seen as a new Reformation. How far along the way are our Churches willing to travel?

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47 Cf. Kremkau, *Ökumenische Aspekte* ,p 303.